

# *Shenandoah*

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## Modern Novelists and Contemporary American Society: A Symposium

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## Modern Novelists and Contemporary American Society: A Symposium

### INTRODUCTION

By LOUIS D. RUBIN, JR.

The basic unit of literature is metaphor. When John Donne likens a bank of violets to a pregnant woman, he is not misleading wayward and untutored readers of poetry; he is offering a total perception of the bank of violets, to be apprehended and realized as an image. We perceive the bank of violets, we experience the bank of violets, we *know* the violets, in a way that a botanical or cartographic analysis cannot possibly inform us. For an image is a totality, a wholeness, and its function is to render a complex perception simultaneously. There is no other method that can do the same thing, and it is worth doing. For that is the way that we as human beings normally perceive things.

A novel, too, is a metaphor. The works of a novelist comprise his attempt to render a complex perception, whether of man or society, in wholeness and totality. And this too is worth doing, for no other method of perception can manage it that way. A novel is an image, a complex, multi-faceted image of a situation, and if we want to apprehend and realize that situation, a novel can help us mightily.

All of which means that in proffering this symposium on modern novelists and contemporary American society, I feel that we have therein an excellent demonstration of the manner in

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which the analysis of literature can be used to provide the analysis of society. The four participants have each taken up the question of the novel's and the novelist's relationship to society, and have sought (I think quite successfully) to understand American society through the novel and the novelist. Together they have provided, I think, both a demonstration of what the literary method can tell us about our society, and some pertinent insights into their individual subjects as well.

I find it particularly appropriate, then, that these papers were all read at a joint session of the American Studies Association and the Modern Language Association, held in New York City on December 27, 1958. For our society, as Mr. Max Lerner reminded those present at a luncheon later on that day, is utterly and urgently dependent upon the written word, the language. If that is so, then surely it is one of the prime reasons why those two groups, and all such scholarly organizations, exist.

C. Hugh Holman

## 1. ERNEST HEMINGWAY

In *To Have and Have Not* Ernest Hemingway calls the automatic pistol an instrument "well-designed to end the American dream, when it becomes a nightmare." In a sense that dream became a nightmare for Hemingway himself early, and his works can be thought of as automatics well-designed to end it. Yet, as John Peale Bishop points out in "The Missing All," "In Hemingway, the emotions that are not there are a silence underlying all sound, a lack which once felt, constantly gives poignancy to the whole." Among the things that echo in the resounding emptiness of the Hemingway universe are the missing social scene, the absent communal ties, and, above all, the nostalgia for all that is lost.

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C. HUGH HOLMAN is chairman of the Department of English at the University of North Carolina.

In his personal life Hemingway seems almost the archetypal expatriated writer. In his late teens he became a volunteer ambulance driver in the Italian army, a response to what Malcolm Cowley has called "a thirst for abstract danger, not suffered for a cause but courted for itself," an experience out of which came "the spectatorial attitude, [a] monumental indifference toward the cause for which young Americans were risking their lives." After the war, he was in America only two years. By late 1921 he was back in Europe, where he was to remain with other expatriated writers until 1927 and where he was to perfect the stripped magnificence of his craftsmanship. For the next ten years his home was the southernmost tip of the United States, Key West, but much of his time was spent in Africa and Spain. Since 1938 he has lived in Havana but has plied his trade in China, England, and Europe. In 1935 he said, "[America] had been a good country and we had made a bloody mess of it and I would go, now, somewhere else. . . . Let the others come to America who did not know that they had come too late." His career is significantly similar to those of other writers who—at least in the popular mind—rejected America: Henry James, T. S. Eliot, and Ezra Pound.

Perhaps he is most like James, for he left America without leaving Americans; in large measure he deserted the American scene in his major works—only *To Have and Have Not* has an American setting—but he made his subject in part the American abroad. Spain, Italy, Cuba—it is in these warm and warm-blooded countries that he has set down his strangely similar young Americans, all of them products of the calm chill of the northern lakes, woods, and rivers of midwestern America. Hemingway is like James, too, in his single-minded devotion to his craft and his obvious belief that in what the artist makes lies perhaps the only enduring value of this world: "A thousand years makes economics silly," he says, "and a work of art endures forever." He is like James, too, in his avoidance of social and political issues; in only two novels, both hastily written in his middle period, did he attempt equivalents of *The Princess Casamassima*; and these books, *To Have and Have Not* and *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, are flawed and atypical. For his other works he seems to stand upon

his declaration: "Let those who want to save the world if you can get to see it clear and as a whole." For most of his career he has acted upon the assumption he expressed in 1935: "If you serve time for society, democracy, and the other things quite young, and declining any further enlistment make yourself responsible only to yourself, you exchange the pleasant, comforting stench of comrades for something you can never feel in any other way than by yourself."

But where Henry James made a world of manners and complex familial and social relationships, Hemingway has made one of individuals adrift on an uncharted sea of violence, an elemental universe where the senses rather than the system shape action and where, under the haunting threat of death, the present is infinitely precious and the past merely a remote haze.

Yet always implicit and sometimes explicit is Hemingway's criticism of the social world and the America that his characters reject. In *The Torrents of Spring* American society is presented as materialistic and meaningless. The emptiness of a world torn loose from its moorings, a world in which the old words that described order and meaning—"glory, honor, courage, hallow"—have become "obscene" and only the names and numbers of specific, concrete objects can have meaning—the emptiness of this world is powerfully presented in *A Farewell to Arms*, whose hero can, like Nick Adams in *In Our Time*, declare himself out of the game and try to make a "separate peace." *The Sun Also Rises* compares with strict consistency the frenetic meaninglessness of a "sick" society with the keen winds of the Spanish mountains and the sparkling clarity of a Spanish river. *To Have and Have Not* contrasts with bitterness and scorn the life of rich sophisticates with the homey virtues of a middle-aged rum-runner.

Hemingway also criticizes America and its customs through its women, whom he pictures as shallow, pampered, selfish, and faithless. Mrs. Francis Macomber, Helène Bradley and Dorothy Hollis in *To Have and Have Not*, Helen in "The Snows of Kilimanjaro," Colonel Cantwell's American ex-wife in *Across the River and Into the Trees*—through these and many others Hemingway pays his scornful respects to American womanhood and marriage.

In *Across the River* the Colonel says, "... if a girl is really beautiful, she comes from Texas and maybe, with luck, she can tell you what month it is. They can all count good though. They teach them how to count, and keep their legs together, and how to put their hair up in pin curls." This is Hemingway's version of Henry Adams' "monthly-magazine-made American female [who has] not a feature that would have been recognized by Adam." Hemingway contrasts her with his equivalents of Adams' Virgin or Venus, with his series of beautiful European women—Catherine Barkley, Maria, Renata—women who may be, as they have been called, "adolescent erotic daydreams," but who are also symbols of a great, natural, and mysterious energy at the primitive center of life. The love affairs that young Americans have with these women remain outside the marriage covenant; yet, although the affairs are doomed, these women are absolutely faithful in mind and body.

Hemingway also attacks America through his pictures of its writers, generally little men who are journalists and time servers. The hero of "The Snows of Kilimanjaro" who has sold his talent too often; Robert Cohn in *The Sun Also Rises*, who was "not one of us"; the false sociological novelist, Richard Gordon, in *To Have and Have Not*, who is writing a novel, apparently based on ignorance, about the Gastonia textile strike; the mediocre journalist-writer with the pitted face on whom so much scorn is heaped in *Across the River*; the weaklings who write war novels—these figures symbolize the arts in America, where, in contrast to Europe, as Sergeant Jackson says, "All they got in the local museum is arrow heads, war bonnets, scalping knives, different scalps, petrified fish, pipes of peace, photographs of Liver Eating Johnston, and the skin of some bad man that they hanged him and some doctor skinned him out."

Running through much of Hemingway is an explicit rejection of American crassness and vulgarity. It is a persistent refrain in the thoughts of Colonel Cantwell, who is hauntingly reminded of ugly midwestern towns, of "the grave-yards of automobiles, those mechanical elephant cemeteries that are the one certain thing you may find in our world near any populated center," of "fal-

sies," of "the very high brass [that] speaks in terms of American football so that they can understand, themselves, what they are talking of," of raincoats that are not water-proof, of comic books ranging "from superman on up into the improbable," of the "sad, self-righteous, over-fed and undertrained" Americans. The Colonel summarizes his views on America in these words: "We are governed by what you find in the bottom of dead beer glasses that whores have dunked their cigarettes in. The place has not even been swept out yet and they have an amateur pianist beating on the box." And when he is asked, "You don't want anything American?" he replies, "The hell with anything American except me." Even when we discount those words because the Colonel is, as he says, "the unjust bitter criticizer who speaks badly of everyone," the indictment remains powerful.

To this complex ugliness Hemingway opposes an idyllic view of nature and a simple primitivism. In *The Sun Also Rises*, after the fevered haziness of the alcoholic scenes in Paris, come the Spanish mountains, serene and sane, and the curative joys of communion with nature in the fishing scenes. This natural, primitive order becomes the standard against which Paris and Pamplona are measured. In "Big Two-Hearted River" Nick Adams, returned from the horror of war and unable to sleep because of the torments of memory, finds in simple communion with the natural world, through walking, working, and fishing, the calm peace which nature gives and a sense of the elemental order which man has violated. The story is a close parallel both in action and in meaning to Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey." Wordsworthian too is Hemingway's sense that childhood is good and that maturity is the process by which the world builds prison walls around us. The world of nature is sparkling, clear, bracing; it is healthy, it is curative, it is all that is left of the lost paradise. When Colonel Cantwell learns that Sergeant Jackson has never known the joys of the hunt, he declares, "I never saw a city boy yet that was worth a damn."

In the world which man as a social animal has built is not a greater structure of values than there is in the primitive natural world but rather a far lesser one. This social world of maturity

is like the empty, echoing café of "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place," where the old waiter can pray, "Our nada who art in nada, nada be thy name . . . Hail nothing full of nothing, nothing is with thee"; and who knew that "It was all a nothing . . . and light was all it needed and a certain cleanness and order." Hemingway's heroes reject this meaningless social world and attempt through their private codes and their individual actions to impose an inward light, cleanness, and order upon experience. They consciously take their position *outside* the social scene, outside the communal tie, outside the marriage bond. No longer children, no longer living in the clear light of the fresh, bright, primitive morning, they still wish to live by its simple codes, even in the evening twilight of the social dilemma. These heroes are, as Colin Wilson has noted, Hemingway's portraits of the "Existentialist Outsider," who has been given a youthful glimpse of a part of himself "that is not contented with the trivial and unheroic" and for whom "Freedom lies in finding a course of action that gives expression to that part." Yet this hero is denied a social solution to his problem by Hemingway's attitudes toward society and he must attempt to find his answer in the separateness of his isolated self.

Hemingway, in giving artistic expression to this position, fashioned the simple actions of his stories in a primitive, non-social world, and he created a style marked by concrete, specific, non-evaluating words and simple syntax. William Barrett has noted that Hemingway's intent, realized in style and subject, is an attempt "to break through empty abstractions of whatever kind, to destroy sentimentality even if the real feelings exposed should appear humble and impoverished—the names of places and dates; and even if in stripping himself naked the artist seems to be left with Nothing. . . . The triumph of Hemingway's style is its ability to break through abstractions to see what it is one really senses and feels."

In this respect *Across the River and Into the Trees* is an illuminating commentary. In this novel, Colonel Richard Cantwell, whose boyhood experiences closely parallel those of Nick Adams and whose experiences in the first World War closely parallel those



of Frederic Henry, finds himself at the age of fifty in Venice, a city he has loved, attempting to savor once more those private delights and pleasures which life has given him—hunting, good food and drink, the companionship of comrades in adversity, and the love of beautiful women. Death is immediately before him, for he is keeping his bad heart going now only with drugs. His life has been spent in the army, where decision is largely removed from the individual, where there is, as he says, “no privacy,” and “You live by coordinates.” The book is a lyrical expression of this man’s emotions as he revisits the city that he has loved best and tries to find in it some pleasure and, above all, the courage to meet his impending death with dignity.

Cantwell is the outsider carried to the end of life, who must go out, not in a high-pitched frenzy of Browningsque strenuousness, but with a calm look at himself and his world. Over all the events of the book hang the drab grayness and the artificial glare of the well-lighted café. Over none of the events gleams the light of youth or spontaneity. Yet the intensity of the Colonel’s search for the self-submerging delight is communicated effectively. I think critics have greatly underestimated the magnitude of Hemingway’s accomplishment in this gray and disturbing record of the meaninglessness of Colonel Cantwell’s final days. The tragedy of the outsider gets full expression here, and the very emptiness of Cantwell’s victory—and it is a victory—ultimately asserts what Hemingway had said once before, in a brief period of social commitment, through the dying words of Harry Morgan: “‘One man alone ain’t got. No man alone now. . . . No matter how a man alone ain’t got no . . . chance.’” Hemingway adds, “It had taken him all of his life to learn it,” and the same might be said of Colonel Richard Cantwell.

Of Hemingway’s next book, *The Old Man and the Sea*, William Faulkner said, “Until now, his men and women had made themselves, shaped themselves out of their own clay; their victories and defeats were at the hands of each other, just to prove to themselves or one another how tough they could be. But this time, he wrote . . . about something somewhere that made them all.” If there is an element of truth in the comment—and I think



there is—*Across the River and Into the Trees* is the route by which Hemingway's new position was reached; for, if *The Old Man and the Sea* is Hemingway's "Everlasting Yea," then *Across the River* is the "Everlasting Nay" that made it possible.

So we must conclude that Hemingway, in his rejection of American society, has been consistent and courageous. He has followed the path of the outsider to its conclusion, and there he has faced the obvious end: the fact that the outsider who rejects society in the warm flush of the youthful memory of a world bright, fresh, and pure, comes finally to the weary end of Colonel Cantwell and in the drab staleness finds nothing but the ashes of memory and an artificial light.

John Lydenberg

## 2. COZZENS' MAN OF RESPONSIBILITY

When last heard from in *The Catcher in the Rye*, Holden Caulfield was somewhere out West, free at last from the phonies and the Winners, after his lonely wanderings through the populous city, its Grand Central, its Central Park, its lavatories. The last words heard from Arthur Winner came after his solitary walk up old Brocton's streets, filled with the ghosts of his past and the symbols of his future burdens, as he entered his mother's house and called up the stairs to those awaiting his advice and support, "I'm here." At the end of his books, Holden Caulfield refused to be civilized and lit out for the West to escape Pencey Prep and his parents. At the end of his, Arthur Winner is back in his father's house, continuing on his round of duties. Holden Caulfield retains his integrity by escaping, alone; Arthur Winner's integrity is grounded in responsibility to family and community.

Holden Caulfield is not merely an urban Huck Finn. He is a scion of the main line of adult heroes in American fiction. From

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Natty Bumpo and Ahab on down, they remain outside society—or, if inside, they are beaten or isolated. They cry Ah Lost, Lost, Lost, I can't go home again; or are perverted like Sutpen as he drives all ahead of him to destruction; or deluded like Gatsby waving farewell from the steps of his empty mansion and smiling his incorruptible smile; or trapped like Frederick Henry as he tries to escape with Cat to the mountains only to be forced down to the valley and her death in the rain. Boy or adult, this hero is ultimately alone, alone against society, and whether he whimpers or shouts defiance or wordlessly makes his private peace he is defeated. He is not responsible for his defeat—It or They did it to him—for he had not been responsible to society.

The early Cozzens novels presented sympathetically this outsider, this recusant, this irresponsible man against immoral society. Then with *The Last Adam* Cozzens said goodbye to all that. His last traditional hero is old Doc Bull who goes a-wenching with Janet Cardmaker on her rundown farm while mothers in the village below beg the switchboard operator to locate the doctor for their ailing children. Cozzens makes the conventional contrast between the virility of the defiant individualist and the sterility of the patrician Bannings who trim their flower beds and barely maintain the facade of leadership of the gentle folk. When at the end Bull relaxes with a grunt before the kitchen fire and Janet murmurs, "The old bastard," we close the book with a warm glow of recognition. He belongs with the village atheists, the flouters of the Pharisees, the sturdy independents who truckle to no one, the natural men unspoiled by a society or phonies. Bull has showed them—the Bannings, the idle rich, the churchgoers.

But Bull was to his creator the last Adam, the last romantic hero, the last innocent irresponsible. It was from the Banning stock instead of Doc Bull's that Cozzens' future heroes would descend: pillars of their society, upholders of order, exemplars of the gentle, the genteel, the good—lawyers, district attorneys, preachers, judges. These are stock heroes in sentimental fiction from Alger through Wouk. But in serious American fiction, far from being the protagonists, they are normally the antagonists. Remember the Dos Passos litany: "how . . . rebuild the ruined

words worn slimy in the mouths of lawyers districtattorneys collegepresidents judges." Cozzens has presented as hero three out of four of Dos Passos' villains; maybe in his next book he will seek to rehabilitate the college president—or, if he wants a real challenge, the trustees.

In what I take to be deliberate opposition to literary fashion, Cozzens has chosen to write sympathetically about men of responsibility. To the question, "Men and Brethren, what shall we do?" (the epigraph of his clerical novel), Cozzens replies: Act, act carefully, reasonably, responsibly. In contrast to this middle position, most American literature answers the question by pointing toward one extreme or another: you shall seek salvation either by attempting to remake your society in the shape of your dreams, or, more often, by escaping and isolating yourself from the contamination of a sick society. Neither a revolutionary nor a Vag wandering down the lonely road, the Cozzens hero is a man in steady converse with his fellows, carrying on, picking up the pieces, doing the best he can to hold the mess to a minimum, stoically striving to do the impossible.

This amounts in effect to a defense of the Pharisees. Traditionally, the Pharisee is a stock figure of reprobation: self-righteous, hypocritical, censorious, simply wrong. In opposition to him, we are usually given the children of light who recognize the spirit as against the letter and follow a natural code that transcends the merely legal. Cozzens turns the tables, suggesting that the Pharisees are right after all, that active works, not faith or grace, is the way to salvation. To him, those who deem themselves children of light are only misguided enthusiasts; he has no faith in people who claim to have heard a new gospel, no liking for antinomians who consider themselves above the law. The man of responsibility must be in deed, in works, better than other men, and he must recognize his own superiority if he is to be of help to his less well-endowed fellows. Where would we go to find these men but to the old established families, who are trained in self-restraint and noblesse oblige and have no axes to grind or no new worlds to conquer? Cozzens sides with Jefferson against Jackson in believing that a democracy must be led by the aris-

tocracy of virtue and talents; against Jefferson he sides with John Adams in believing this natural aristocracy will most often coincide with the aristocracy of birth and wealth.

Old-fashioned as is Cozzens' reliance upon the genteel upholders of tradition, his view of the universe is starkly modern. In *The Last Adam* May Topping formulates explicitly what Cozzens merely implies in his later works.

Left to herself and to what she could see of the universe, real and ideal were lost together in an indifference so colossal, so utterly indifferent that there was no defining it. This immense mindlessness knew no reasons, had no schemes; there was no cause for it. Where could it begin and why should it end? There was even an error in personifying the universe as It, saying: How could it either plan or prevent Mrs. Talbot's misfortunes? How could It care? "Only, I care," May thought. "I think it's terrible. It oughtn't to be that way."

Gone is the faith that made it possible for Cozzens' 18th and 19th century forebears to carry their burdens of leadership—the faith that moral law pervaded a moral universe. Cozzens knows no saving God and no divine plan. He has no faith in the natural goodness or wisdom of men. He sees no progress and no mission for America. His world is as bleak as that of any naturalist or existentialist. It is more disheartening than that of Hemingway or Faulkner, for to him there is neither escape nor transcendence; he will not permit himself the luxury of bitterness or rage or despair.

One must act, and acting must choose. But the choices are not eschatological, not transforming leaps, not even choices of goods; each is part of an interminable series of choices between evils. It is not even a matter of Winner Take Nothing; there are no winners. In *By Love Possessed* Arthur muses about "the kinds of victory attainable in life."

Might all of them be forms of defeat: givings-up; compromises; assents to the second best; abandonments of hope in the face of the ascertained fact that what was to be, was to be?

But if Cozzens' heroes learn that they must abandon hope on entering the dark wood (Arthur Winner's first wife was named

Hope), they also know that they must not abandon their responsibilities. Most men do not even recognize their responsibility—because they are too weak or too stupid or too selfish to do anything but follow the easiest course. The few elect can usually hear the voice of reason over the whirlwind calls of passion and the Siren cries of expediency, but they are not saints, they do not make a saving remnant. They have merely the weary misfortune for themselves—which is the good fortune for their weaker brothers—of having the intelligence and the conscience that makes them aware and responsible.

Responsible to what? There's the rub. There is nothing in this absurd world, and certainly nothing outside it, for them to be responsible *to*. It is rather a matter of responsibility almost for its own sake. Responsibility for maintaining order, or rather minimizing disorder, for preserving a modicum of reason in an irrational world. Society is held together by fragile threads which the foolish, selfish people are continuously snapping and snarling. The task of the Cozzens hero is simply to keep the tangle to a minimum and to preserve the fabric of society. Thus he is dedicated to the support of the status quo.

Probably the most obvious example of this is the embroglio over Negro use of an all-white officers club in *Guard of Honor*. Colonel Ross is presented as the man of reason and commonsense, a man to emulate. As a Northerner, he does not particularly approve of discrimination against Negroes, but as an army officer his responsibility leads him to oppose the liberals and radicals whose efforts to bring about changes—"reforms" they call them—are bringing only disruption. Thus he works to maintain segregation, not because he believes in it, but because the interests of order and the smooth functioning of the social machinery call for no tinkering with the accepted way of doing things. His vision does not reach beyond Ocanara Air Force Base or beyond the end of the war; he sees only the here and now. Whatever the pattern of the society, his duty is simply to preserve it.

Thoroughly engaged, entangled in the social fabric, participating in actions that have social consequences, Cozzens' protagonists are nevertheless unconcerned with the fate of their society

in any significant sense. Never do they strive to understand the pattern in the social carpet or puzzle out its meaning. They are not interested in the "complex fate" of being an American, or the impact of industrialism, or the tyranny of the majority or oppression by minorities, or the degradation of the democratic dogma, or the American mission. None of these themes which infuse significant American fiction are important to Cozzens. His concern is exclusively with things as they are—not as they might or should be.

It is this conservatism that stimulated some of the sharpest attacks upon *By Love Possessed*. The two most important were by Dwight Macdonald in *Commentary* and Irving Howe in *The New Republic*. Howe described Cozzens' view as the "Philosophy of Limit," its motto: "never try to piss up the wind." Cozzens, he said,

has not favored the Zeitgeist, . . . the weary Zeitgeist . . . has finally limped round to him. And, indeed, a civilization that finds its symbolic embodiment in Dwight David Eisenhower and its practical guide in John Foster Dulles has been well prepared for receiving the fruits of the Philosophy of Limit. It is a civilization that, in its naked and graceless undelusion, deserves as its laureate James Gould Cozzens—Novelist of the Republic!

Macdonald slashed devastatingly at Cozzens' style, but for our purposes the important points are his contention that the success of *By Love Possessed* was part of the growing "Middlebrow Revolution," and that it was a "Novel of Resignation" in the genre of Marquand, Sloan Wilson and Herman Wouk, reflecting an attitude in which "the conventional world, the System, is confused with Life."

No one would have expected Mac the knife to leave unflayed an author whose novel was at the same time pretentious in style, conservative, and popular, but one might have hoped he would not cut quite so indiscriminatingly. Cozzens is a conservative, but his conservatism is more like Hawthorne's than Eisenhower's. Cozzens' dislike of the highbrow bears no relation to the Life-Time-serving of Herman Wouk; he has as much contempt as

Mencken had for middlebrow inanities. Indeed many of Cozzens' pet aversions are akin to those of the partisan dissenters: sentimentalism, vulgarity, conformity, complacent optimism, authoritarianism in religion, platitudes and preachments. Cozzens is a conservative not because he thinks we have developed the best of all societies, not because he has any faith in our industrial organization men or their Madison or Pennsylvania Avenue spokesmen, but because he has an almost Puritan pessimism about human nature and human beings. He is neither complacent nor content, but he is, to accept Howe's term, undelusioned.

It is this quality of undelusion—or lack of vision—which most infuriates those in whom the fires of the thirties still burn bright; it is this which makes him most un-American as an author; and it is in this respect that his conservatism *is* typical of the times. It not only lacks any vision of the future; it lacks any clear notion of what it is trying to conserve. The protagonists of his last three books have been lawyers (Colonel Ross was a judge in civilian life). Like the lawyer atop our present cabinet, his lawyer-heroes are concerned in each crisis only with the immediate problem before them. They look forward to no Armageddon, nor do they dream of recovering a lost golden age. They seek merely to make the least painful accommodation possible; they seek only to minimize in each particular case the troublesome consequences of the especial folly that has disturbed the normally unsatisfactory course of human events.

Never does it become necessary for a Cozzens protagonist to dissolve the bonds of the past and seek to assume for himself or his society a new station. He seeks not independence or a better world but simply responsibility to what is. And thus, paradoxically, he isolates himself from the great tradition. The characteristic strain in our society—and indeed in modern Western society—has been the ceaseless attempt of the individual, and of his society, to break the chains that bind and forge a new pattern for his life, to hear the voice from the burning bush and set out on a pilgrimage to a new land. The Old Testament prophets, Prometheus and Faust and Ulysses, the Renaissance men and the Romantics—these are our true ancestors. But Cozzens knows them not, and



tocracy of virtue and talents; against Jefferson he sides with John Adams in believing this natural aristocracy will most often coincide with the aristocracy of birth and wealth.

Old-fashioned as is Cozzens' reliance upon the genteel upholders of tradition, his view of the universe is starkly modern. In *The Last Adam* May Tuppington formulates explicitly what Cozzens merely implies in his later works.

Left to herself and to what she could see of the universe, real and ideal were lost together in an indifference so colossal, so utterly indifferent that there was no defining it. This immense mindlessness knew no reasons, had no schemes; there was no cause for it. Where could it begin and why should it end? There was even an error in personifying the universe as It, saying: How could it either plan or prevent Mrs. Talbot's misfortunes? How could It care? "Only, I care," May thought. "I think it's terrible. It oughtn't to be that way."

Gone is the faith that made it possible for Cozzens' 18th and 19th century forebears to carry their burdens of leadership—the faith that moral law pervaded a moral universe. Cozzens knows no saving God and no divine plan. He has no faith in the natural goodness or wisdom of men. He sees no progress and no mission for America. His world is as bleak as that of any naturalist or existentialist. It is more disheartening than that of Hemingway or Faulkner, for to him there is neither escape nor transcendence; he will not permit himself the luxury of bitterness or rage or despair.

One must act, and acting must choose. But the choices are not eschatological, not transforming leaps, not even choices of goods; each is part of an interminable series of choices between evils. It is not even a matter of Winner Take Nothing; there are no winners. In *By Love Possessed* Arthur muses about "the kinds of victory attainable in life."

Might all of them be forms of defeat: givings-up; compromises; assents to the second best; abandonments of hope in the face of the ascertained fact that what was to be, was to be?

But if Cozzens' heroes learn that they must abandon hope on entering the dark wood (Arthur Winner's first wife was named



Hope), they also know that they must not abandon their responsibilities. Most men do not even recognize their responsibility—because they are too weak or too stupid or too selfish to do anything but follow the easiest course. The few elect can usually hear the voice of reason over the whirlwind calls of passion and the Siren cries of expediency, but they are not saints, they do not make a saving remnant. They have merely the weary misfortune for themselves—which is the good fortune for their weaker brothers—of having the intelligence and the conscience that makes them aware and responsible.

Responsible to what? There's the rub. There is nothing in this absurd world, and certainly nothing outside it, for them to be responsible to. It is rather a matter of responsibility almost for its own sake. Responsibility for maintaining order, or rather minimizing disorder, for preserving a modicum of reason in an irrational world. Society is held together by fragile threads which the foolish, selfish people are continuously snapping and snarling. The task of the Cozzens hero is simply to keep the tangle to a minimum and to preserve the fabric of society. Thus he is dedicated to the support of the status quo.

Probably the most obvious example of this is the embroglio over Negro use of an all-white officers club in *Guard of Honor*. Colonel Ross is presented as the man of reason and commonsense, a man to emulate. As a Northerner, he does not particularly approve of discrimination against Negroes, but as an army officer his responsibility leads him to oppose the liberals and radicals whose efforts to bring about changes—"reforms" they call them—are bringing only disruption. Thus he works to maintain segregation, not because he believes in it, but because the interests of order and the smooth functioning of the social machinery call for no tinkering with the accepted way of doing things. His vision does not reach beyond Ocanara Air Force Base or beyond the end of the war; he sees only the here and now. Whatever the pattern of the society, his duty is simply to preserve it.

Thoroughly engaged, entangled in the social fabric, participating in actions that have social consequences, Cozzens' protagonists are nevertheless unconcerned with the fate of their society

in any significant sense. Never do they strive to understand the pattern in the social carpet or puzzle out its meaning. They are not interested in the "complex fate" of being an American, or the impact of industrialism, or the tyranny of the majority or oppression by minorities, or the degradation of the democratic dogma, or the American mission. None of these themes which infuse significant American fiction are important to Cozzens. His concern is exclusively with things as they are—not as they might or should be.

It is this conservatism that stimulated some of the sharpest attacks upon *By Love Possessed*. The two most important were by Dwight Macdonald in *Commentary* and Irving Howe in *The New Republic*. Howe described Cozzens' view as the "Philosophy of Limit," its motto: "never try to piss up the wind." Cozzens, he said,

has not favored the Zeitgeist, . . . the weary Zeitgeist . . . has finally limped round to him. And, indeed, a civilization that finds its symbolic embodiment in Dwight David Eisenhower and its practical guide in John Foster Dulles has been well prepared for receiving the fruits of the Philosophy of Limit. It is a civilization that, in its naked and graceless undelusion, deserves as its laureate James Gould Cozzens—Novelist of the Republic!

Macdonald slashed devastatingly at Cozzens' style, but for our purposes the important points are his contention that the success of *By Love Possessed* was part of the growing "Middlebrow Revolution," and that it was a "Novel of Resignation" in the genre of Marquand, Sloan Wilson and Herman Wouk, reflecting an attitude in which "the conventional world, the System, is confused with Life."

No one would have expected Mac the knife to leave unflayed an author whose novel was at the same time pretentious in style, conservative, and popular, but one might have hoped he would not cut quite so indiscriminately. Cozzens is a conservative, but his conservatism is more like Hawthorne's than Eisenhower's. Cozzens' dislike of the highbrow bears no relation to the Life-Time-serving of Herman Wouk; he has as much contempt as

Mencken had for middlebrow inanities. Indeed many of Cozzens' pet aversions are akin to those of the partisan dissenters: sentimentalism, vulgarity, conformity, complacent optimism, authoritarianism in religion, platitudes and preachments. Cozzens is a conservative not because he thinks we have developed the best of all societies, not because he has any faith in our industrial organization men or their Madison or Pennsylvania Avenue spokesmen, but because he has an almost Puritan pessimism about human nature and human beings. He is neither complacent nor content, but he is, to accept Howe's term, undelusioned.

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denies them when he hears of them. Of the great figures of our past, his heroes most recall Aeneas. *Pius* Aeneas, conscientious, good, dull, plugging along from vicissitude to vicissitude, quietly complaining at his lot though he never relaxes in his stern pursuit of duty. But even this analogy breaks down at the crucial point. Aeneas had a vision of the future; Aeneas had an end, a goal, a mission. Cozzens' heroes have nowhere to go. Society is static, with neither past nor future. America as the New World, whether the land of promises or of betrayals, simply does not exist for him.

Despite what Howe and Macdonald imply, Cozzens is no believer in the easy established orthodoxies; he is at one with the highbrows in deploring the sentimentalism of the age. Thus he stands alone, isolated from the positive thinkers on one hand and the dissenters on the other. The recusant may refuse to attend the services because, unable to accept the rituals and beliefs, he insists on lighting our for the Territory, or for Some-other-land. Or he may refuse because he wants a different service, one he believes will better serve man or the American man's dream. In any case, whether escaping or staying to fight, he refuses to participate in the accepted ceremonies. But vestryman Arthur Winner faithfully serves without faith, doing his best to keep the institution going. And after the service, always, Arthur Winner goes home again, to help Aunt Maud, and the Aunt Sallys—responsible to the end, and with nothing more to say than, "I'm here."

James B. Meriwether

### 3. WILLIAM FAULKNER

Of America's major novelists of this century, William Faulkner has until now been unique in his refusal to leave his native town and his continued close identification with it. Since the pub-

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lication in 1929 of *Sartoris*, his life and his works have borne witness to his deep commitment to the place of his birth, and it is hardly to be doubted that the strength of that commitment is responsible for many of the best and most characteristic qualities of his writing. But the circumstances of Faulkner's life, the necessities of his own career as a writer, the age in which he has lived, and finally, his own character, have combined with that commitment to increase the normal tensions and paradoxes which are part of any serious artist's life. Inseparable from Faulkner's identification with his native country has been his withdrawal from it; he has made heroic efforts to maintain his privacy against the onslaught of reporters, critics, and scholars, yet he has accepted a responsibility in being a public figure, since the award of the Nobel Prize in 1950, and has made good will tours for the State Department and headed a writers' committee at the request of the President of the United States. An outspoken critic of his country, and his section of the country, when at home, he has repeatedly and loyally defended them when abroad. His attachment to the town where he has lived almost his entire life has never prevented him from alienating his fellow townspeople, liberals and conservatives alike, by his moderate but forthright stands on public issues, stands which have undoubtedly made it more difficult for him, and for his family, to live there. I use the term "more difficult," because it is doubtful if Faulkner, even in the total absence of all public issues, would fit very neatly into any close-knit community like Oxford, Mississippi. His old friend Phil Stone in 1933 referred to Faulkner as "the sanest and most wholesome person I have ever known," but added immediately that he was also "the most aggravating damned human being the Lord ever put on this earth." The combination of qualities may help explain the lifelong refusal to conform which has characterized Faulkner, as an individual and as a writer, in his reactions to the environment which his country and his time have presented him.

These reactions have been in many ways so strikingly different from those of Ernest Hemingway that the two writers afford as illuminating a contrast as do Mark Twain and Henry James a generation or two before them. In their early careers Faulkner and

Hemingway had more in common than is generally realized. Born within a year of each other, both come from the central part of the United States. (Though the usual emphasis upon Faulkner as a Southerner obscures this point, Faulkner himself has repeatedly emphasized the fact that he comes from the region of the Mississippi valley, not the region of the Atlantic coast). Their common geographical background is reflected in what both writers have had to say about American literary history. Both have insisted upon the importance of the Mark Twain of *Huckleberry Finn* to American letters in the 19th century, and both have paid tribute to Sherwood Anderson and the importance of Anderson's revolt, in the 20th century, against the literary tradition of Eastern America. Faulkner has said that he considered the literary father of his own and also of Hemingway's writing to be Anderson: "He showed us the way," said Faulkner, "because up to that time the American writer had been an easterner—he looked across the Atlantic, to England, to France, but only at Anderson's time had we an American who was primarily American. He lived in the big central part of the Mississippi valley, and wrote what he found there."

But there was a time in Faulkner's career when he too looked across the Atlantic to England and France. Like Hemingway, Faulkner tried to join in the European experience of World War I, though he was still in training in Canada to be a Royal Air Force pilot when the war ended. In 1922, when he was writing poems and working at the University of Mississippi, he published in the college newspaper an article on American drama in which he sympathized with the plight of the talented young American writers who were flocking to Europe. They had left home, he said, because they "found America aesthetically impossible." Yet, he added, recognizing the dilemma of the expatriates, "being of America, [they] will some day return, a few into dyspeptic exile, others to write joyously for the movies." Faulkner went on to praise the "inexhaustible fund of dramatic material" which America afforded its writers, but expressed his contempt for the unhealthy American literary atmosphere, which, he felt, meant that "those who are doing worth while things really labor infinitely more than the

results achieved would show." Early in 1925, in an article in the *Double Dealer*, he praised English literary criticism and lashed out at the stupidity of American critics. "The English review criticises the book, the American the author," he concluded—an accurate prophecy, unfortunately, of the nature of a quarter of a century of Faulkner criticism.

Later in 1925, soon after completing his first novel, *Soldiers' Pay*, Faulkner set out for Europe himself, making, as Hemingway had already done, the pilgrimage that was almost obligatory for young writers in the 1920's. But here his path diverged sharply from Hemingway's. In Europe Faulkner never joined, even temporarily, the group of expatriate American writers who had swarmed to Paris. After a few months of walking, sightseeing, and a little writing, he returned, late in 1925, to America, to live and to write. Within a few years he had married and settled down in Oxford, and the Yoknapatawpha series, beginning with *Sartoris*, was well underway. It would be twenty-five years before he returned to Europe, or wrote a book with a European setting.

No simple answer satisfies the question, what brought Faulkner back home from Europe to discover his deep roots in his native soil. In later years, he has himself paid generous tribute to the personal influence of Sherwood Anderson, whom he had known in New Orleans just before the European trip. "You're a country boy; all you know is that little patch up there in Mississippi where you started from," Anderson had warned him in New Orleans. And Faulkner dedicated *Sartoris* to Anderson. But before *Sartoris*, Faulkner had written *Mosquitoes*, with its satiric depiction of Anderson as the novelist Dawson Fairchild, and before that, Faulkner had, like Hemingway, deeply hurt Anderson by publishing a parody on his style. If Faulkner eventually turned his back on Europe and the expatriates, in the 1920's, to follow in his writings Anderson's example and advice, it was not so easy and natural a decision as has sometimes been assumed to be the case.

Faulkner's first few novels of the Yoknapatawpha series showed clearly how different were the paths he and Hemingway had taken from their common geographical and literary background, and furnished an answer to the question of what had brought him



home. There have been a few things which Faulkner and Hemingway have had in common in their mature work; a certain pervasive anti-intellectualism (in which they both differ from Cozzens), a love of beauty, the frequent use of hunting and wilderness scenes—to both writers the dominant urban, industrial civilization of this century has been poison. But what the two men do not have in common is most striking. As Robert Penn Warren has put it, the difference between the two writers is almost *too* pat, too schematic. In Faulkner, Warren has said in an interview, “there are always the very old and the very young. Time spreads and is the important thing, the terrible thing.” But “there’s no time in Hemingway, there are only moments in themselves, moments of action. There are no parents and no children.” Warren might have added considerably to his list of opposites. Thematically, Faulkner’s interest in children and old people shows his concern with the family, and with the past. Hemingway’s concern is with comradeship between men, with romantic and sexual love between men and women, and the present. Stylistically, Hemingway has been concerned with perfection, Faulkner with richness, plenitude. Faulkner has been deeply concerned with problems of point of view and of structure. Hemingway has not. Faulkner’s work abounds in humor. Faulkner doesn’t write about writers. Faulkner showed no interest in the Leftist movement in the 1930’s.

It would be misleading, of course, to make their degree of separation from or identification with America responsible for all differences between Hemingway and Faulkner. Yet it seems safe to say that two of Faulkner’s basic concerns, the importance of family relationships and the presence of the past, are related not only to each other, but to Faulkner’s decision to return to the home of his own family, and to make use of history as it had affected the part of the country he knew best. In Japan, where he spent several weeks for the Department of State in 1955, Faulkner discussed family life in the United States and said that he thought family relationships were much closer in the South than in the rest of America: “it is regional. It is through what we call the ‘South.’ It doesn’t matter what the people do. They can be land people, farmers, and industrialists, but there still exists the feel-



ing of blood, of clan." And Faulkner advanced one very interesting, though perhaps unhistorical, reason for this continued clanishness: the long years of comparative poverty after the Civil War, he felt, and the consequent lack of material possessions, encouraged the unity of communities and families in the South.

I do not mean to imply that, had Hemingway been a Southerner, he might have returned to America to live after a short fling in France. We need only the example of Thomas Wolfe to remind us that close-knit families can breed a feeling of rebellion as well as a sense of belonging. But in Faulkner's case, the family and community ties and loyalties apparent in his work have also held him fast at home in life.

Faulkner has made important use of the Southern past, in his works, to articulate his indictment of evils in contemporary America. That he does not sentimentalize or glorify the ante-bellum days is apparent from the harshness of his judgment of Thomas Sutpen, and even John Sartoris. But he has carefully contrasted certain virtues, in their generation, with the faults of Sutpen and Sartoris: their energy and ability, their belief in a personal code of honor, and perhaps most important of all, the sharp distinction they made between right and wrong, despite the weaknesses in their moral codes or their failures to live up to their standards. By comparison, the modern age which Faulkner depicts in *Sanctuary* and *Requiem for a Nun*, and to some extent in *Sartoris* and *The Town*, the age of the automobile, the bank, and organized gangsterism, shows a serious slackening of energy and a blurring of the distinction between right and wrong which had characterized the old codes. This is the Snopes age, and there is nothing local or regional in the application Faulkner makes in *The Town* of his indictment of the landless, rootless, faithless, sterile spirit of commercialism which animates Flem Snopes.

The affirmation, even optimism, of Faulkner's Nobel Prize address in 1950, and its statement that one of the duties of the writer was to uplift the human heart, came as a shock to the critics who had concerned themselves only with the dark side of Faulkner's work. Yet almost from the beginning, the chronological structure of the Yoknapatawpha series as a whole had been mov-

ing toward an at least partially affirmative conclusion and offering hope for the future along the way. This conclusion has been apparent since the publication of *Intruder in the Dust*, in 1948, and *The Town*, published in 1957 but preceding *Intruder*, chronologically, in the ages of its characters. In the figure of Chick Mallison, Faulkner shows a modern American who—though not yet a man in his appearances so far—has the ability to act which characterized the Sutpen-John Sartoris generation, and who has the honor and integrity so needed in the age of Snopesism. It is too soon to guess what Faulkner intends to do with Mallison in *The Mansion*, the concluding volume of the Snopes trilogy, upon which he is now working. But it is already apparent that Mallison is to contrast strongly with his moral but ineffective uncle, Gavin Stevens, who talks and talks but never acts in *Intruder*. In an interview in 1955 Faulkner, discussing the characters of the Yoknapatawpha series, called Gavin Stevens a “good man” who “didn’t succeed in living up to his ideal. But his nephew, the boy, I think he may grow up to be a better man than his uncle. I think he may succeed as a human being.” It is seldom that Faulkner so explicitly gives us the meaning of his work, and it is apparent that Gavin Stevens’ major function is to serve as link between two generations, and to pass on to his nephew the 19th century moral code which he himself lacks the ability to translate into action.

In his life, Faulkner has fought bitterly against various aspects of the modern American scene. In articles, speeches, and letters to the editor he has fought for the rights of the individual, for racial tolerance, for international harmony. In his fiction he has pointed to the evils inherent in our modern civilization in particular, and those that mankind is heir to in any age. But he has shown, in his whole career as a writer, in his commitment to his homeland, that it is still possible for a writer of major stature to identify himself with the American present, and use the American past to show the possibility of overcoming our weaknesses and redeeming our failures.

Robert Hazel

#### 4. THE NOVELIST'S VIEW

When a certain magistrate in a juvenile court in Kentucky has brought before him a young man who has clubbed his father and set fire to his mother's bed, he presents the characters of this drama with pocket-sized New Testaments and requires them to kiss each other publicly in court. The case is closed. The sequel occurs briefly in the astounded imagination of the psychologist. But the novelist in America has had to stand in this court since the first World War, at the mercy of powerful opposing instincts.

Hemingway made a run for it and escaped. He has not been extradited from France or Cuba, but the price of flight, of evasion has been extracted from his work. Fitzgerald stared at the floor until he cracked up. He had looked too long at the apparent absurdity of any solution to the dilemma. Wolfe finally grew ashamed and tried to kiss and make up. But it was too late for such lugubrious gestures. Dos Passos and Steinbeck were paroled on condition they would regularly turn in reports of their good works among the poor. Probably it did not occur to them that loss of integrity would follow their saying what the court wanted to hear. Faulkner stubbornly brooded, dreaming of rags and gasoline and the grand light of a burning house. A younger man, Warren, deeply impressed by authority, voiced insistence on his own guilt.

Alfred Kazin, in his new introduction to *On Native Grounds*, comments that our society has bred an elite who are totally at variance with the values of this society. Kenneth Rexroth, in a recent essay, characteristically shouts: "It is impossible for an artist to remain true to himself as a man, let alone an artist, and work within the context of this society...an absolute corruption." Nelson Algren provides a witty copestone for the wall between writer and bourgeois: "It is better to be on the lam than

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on the cover of *Time* magazine." All such statements, taken in sum, may be called the Articles of Alienation; and they are so influential in the contemporary situation that writers who attempt to violate them are ostracized. Maxwell Geismar recently confiscated Herman Wouk's typewriter on the grounds that Wouk had been guilty of giving America straight A's on his fictional report cards.

There is nothing remarkable anymore about the central fact of the disengagement and alienation of the American novelist from the objective terms of his country. From James' coy courtship of American innocence to Hemingway's decisive refusal of the banns was a long interesting leap. From Wolfe's fumbling attempt to embrace the continent to the homosexual assault of the West Coast moderns is only a very short step. Novelists are no longer confronted by Twain's America, or Anderson's even; pastorals and romances have no broad spawning beds. We do not even face an urban jungle which the social realists hoped could be cleared, landscaped and turned into a quiet game preserve where the environmental beasts would play together. We deal now with rusted junk heaps where the bums of Algren and Kerouac sit in somber parody of the wandering grifters of Twain and the hoboes of Whitman. So many bridges between writer and society have been burned—the fires having been set from *both* ends—that it is doubtful if they can be rebuilt in our time. If one wants to view with a shudder the chasm between writer sensibility and public sentiment, he has only to compare Fitzgerald, who had nothing against tennis, with Jack Kramer; Hemingway, who lists the virtues of gin, with the Schweppes man; or imagine Faulkner, who is all for death, as a salesman of cemetery lots.

From the writer's view, contemporary America cannot escape the stigma of the automatic transmission gear and the organ that anyone can play without learning music: the unqualified and indiscriminate objects of Success. When Auden first came to the United States, he was astounded that America could have done such a thorough and frightening job of removing all qualitative distinctions among objects. The citizen was expected to react *qualitatively* the same to subway advertisements for bath soap, rye bread and the Virgin. The writer has become a stranger among

billboards, facing each direction he turns a garish carnival of objects he cannot desire because their quality has been reduced: the decay of feeling to bargain-counter level; reason fallen among demagogues; the fragmentation of religious sensibility and the debasement of the terms of religion: Saint Paul has become the Rev. Norman Vincent Peale whose syndicated letters to the churches of Asia Minor and Greece are published in *Look* magazine; and Christ in a leather jacket has entered the city on a motorcycle. Edgar Morin recently observed that for the American public Marlon Brando as John the Baptist heralded the real James Dean.

But writers have always lived in "contemporary" societies, none of them any healthier, I imagine, than ours. Our attempts to wring a tear from the Ford Foundation when we need help may be even trivial and mawkish compared to the situation Samuel Johnson faced with his patron. The problem of securing one's conditions of work is always difficult. But possibly the physical size and variety of our cultural objects creates a dimension that gives our modern alienation a more final and awesome cast than Dr. Johnson could have dreamed of. Detailed grounds and intimate connections are less discoverable now. Observation of particulars in relation to schema has become such an exacting process that the eye tires and the imagination falters. Ortega precisely notes that the novel cannot be novel anymore; the large veins are worked out. No serious contemporary writer tries to mine the entire social system in all its tunnels. Novelists from Fielding through Balzac, say, might attempt objectively to construct society; but by Proust's time this was impossible, his work being not composed of objective terms, but having the character of imaginative biography and confession. If the classic novel in English and French degenerated in the hands of James and Flaubert into an instruction sheet for upper-middle class problems of marriage, career and the management of inferior social contracts, consider the much more limited ground we examine now in the wake of Kafka. For with Kafka the subject of the novel narrowed until objective focus was lost altogether. For us the subject has become the individual man, dangling on the social gallows: our

novels ask how can this man save himself when he is tangled in the fabric of mediocrity, of internal disorder and symptomatic attachment to cultural neuroses. And it is just here that the contemporary writer reveals himself crippled by the severance of intimate connections with his society. Ahab and the whale do not appear in our novels; we write only about Ishmael.

Yet the novelist is *of* this society; it is the given on which his work must build; and he feels that he *should* love its objects and move them about in meaningful patterns. Evidence of this desire is the contemporary writer's faithful realization of the sensory fabric of the common life, the shared experience; but such thwarted love is not permitted to exist except in the larger context of denial: nostalgia, pathos, irony.

The effects of estrangement are not attractive to look at. Denied status and value as a professional person, the novelist turns in on his own resources. The result often is disastrous: the too-early consumption of talent forced to feed on itself. Sometimes exhaustion occurs, followed by silence, as in the case of Carson McCullers. Or botched motivations result in the young writer's producing a good book from deep origins of pain, then retiring to lick his wounds, as with J. D. Salinger. Or like Norman Mailer, the writer may find that his early work makes unseemly advances to the public, and feel like a prodigal who is welcomed home and presented a charcoal steak for the wrong reasons, which only increase the intelligent derelict's sense of guilt. Or the writer may discover that, in the absence of a legitimate occasion provided by society for his work, he has been going on some trumped-up passion, a personal energy subject to whim; and like William Styron, after a considerable early accomplishment, may suffer the profound confusion of hardly knowing what to do next. Or, as in the case of Nelson Algren, there is the ill attempt to deny the life of the whole and to identify one's self with a single broken-nosed element of society and sentimentalize the vitality of pimps and con-men. Others, fashionable in the academic 50's, lower their voices and, like Wright Morris, pretend that *everything* is interesting so long as it is "psychological" and so long as the delicate epiphanies do not disturb the consummate monotone. Or possibly the most subtle

injury of estrangement is that the writer, distrusting for every good reason the quality of his environment, falls back for all the wrong reasons on a fantastic assertion of his own vision and becomes, like Henry Miller or Truman Capote, a victim of childish personal exaggerations.

The temptations of martyrdom are strong in the modern period, or at least the ill pride of the writer's declaring himself the last outpost of integrity, and mawkishly asserting that as an artist he is the last whole and individual man—through he is probably less individual going to a university staff meeting or a publisher's sales conference or to Italy on a grant or to California in a Volkswagen than the garbage man in the alley who improvises his own songs. That our society places every possible hindrance in the way of the serious novelist is merely fact. But for the novelist to congratulate himself on his plight is disease.

Alienation prevents our identification with society as a whole and makes us incapable of sympathetic examination of its objective design. If we are honest, we do not try to counterfeit feeling for the country club, the portable barbecue grill and the T.V. lounge at the airport. Even Cozzens, who manages to maintain a genuine interest in several large blocks of public experience, has to keep himself personally secluded and protected from the vulgar gregariousness that he describes. Alienation is an important reason why our serious literature is not an accurate index to our society: the disinherited writer, a stranger in the house, creates a system of unredeemed pessimisms while the populace flexes its gigantic optimisms in music-filled factories and department stores. If one knew nothing about America between 1920 and 1940 except what our better novelists wrote, he would have sworn this society could not have mustered energy enough for lend-lease, much less a war. Alienation accounts for the dual role our established writers have to play: when Faulkner wrote as a private man, he showed the defeated fury of the human spirit; now when he speaks as a public figure, he voices utter faith in human destiny. The fictional world of Hemingway is strewn with broken men; but in the world that surrounds Stockholm, man is not made for



defeat. Are we to believe the novelist? Or the Nobel Prize orator? I think we must believe both, because both are serious.

But if alienation creates our defects, it also provides our basis for excellence in the modern period. The paradox is simple, and just a little plain looking will discover its solution. Most of the writer's problems are the result of his guilty sullen shrugging stand in court and his misguided efforts to woo a public that spurns him and always will because the public cannot, by its lights, assign him any serious function. Nobody can doubt the destructive influence of this public on the writer so long as he feels guilty and behaves defensively. What novelists must do is learn from poets, who have had to live with this situation a longer time. The solution is to *accept* the fact of alienation, and say no more about it.

The lack of a public occasion for creative literature has crippled the novelist more than the poet because the novelist has not yet learned to relinquish claim of communication with a rather large and ordinary public. Increasingly in modern society anybody who accomplishes something excellent has had to become a thoroughly disciplined specialist. The mathematician and the poet and the bacteriologist have learned to address themselves proudly and without guilt to a knowledgeable few. The serious novelist will have to learn this too, if he is to preserve self-respect and sanity in an age when, as Ortega has described, there are two distinct arts: one for the elite who know; one for the unknowing masses who are hostile to the fine arts. Though nobody could describe such a situation without regret, there is no purpose in pretending. In fact, the gap must inevitably widen as specialization continues and the modern writer achieves even further individuation. All weathervanes point the direction to a mature and formal art of the novel. Stanley Edgar Hyman, for example, writes: "... the most hopeful direction fiction seems to me to be taking at present is toward the conscious use of myth and ritual as an organizing principle..." By the very nature of its formal properties, such an art is special and exclusive. "The material proper for the novel," Ortega writes, "is imaginary psychology." He further remarks on the fact that certain writers who seemed excellent yesterday appear naive today because the new discerning reader



is a much better psychologist than the old author. The novelist nowadays has to hustle to keep up, and has no time to wait for the common reader, who is already caught in the revolving door of popular and bogus "realism."

As the contemporary writer faces his special problem of how to nurture a precise and complex and rich art by careful grafting of lyric and symbol on the decayed root-stock of naturalism—a precarious job, for the entire organism might die—he must leave the entertainment of the public to specialists in that field, who are better equipped to do it anyway. A character in one of Faulkner's stories remarks that he has noticed that you don't have to worry about protecting women and children; there always seems to be plenty of them. The novelist need not worry about good reading for the millions; there will always be enough inexpensive books to go around. His problem is to provide good reading for the few. And maintain himself by any reasonable means: in a university, in a publisher's office, in the technical writing section of an aircraft company, or by the generosity of friends: as he explores what Ortega calls the hidden deposits, and makes "perilous ventures into the depths where, perchance, the most precious crystals grow." What he must *not* do is continue to plague himself for failing to be all things to all men, or he will wind up being nothing to anybody, without substance or identity—hardly worth survival.

Elliott Coleman

*Aubade*

*For Josephine Jacobsen*

Early one October morning  
while reading Aristotle, Beare's translation,  
on Memory and Recollection,  
I heard a mockingbird begin to sing.

He or she insistently won my utter attention:  
I counted ten different songs,  
got up and went to the tenth story window  
but could not see the creature who  
must have been perching high in the tallest of the sun-topped trees:  
the sound was enough: one did not need to see;  
one understood singing in that coolness.

I came back to Aristotle,  
but the singing in the sun went on:  
back to the mockingbird:  
back and forth,  
back and forth,  
swinging between,  
drifting between  
mockingbird, memory . . .

The ten (and I think more) tunes were repeated.  
As text and repertory mingled  
and then grew rather faint,  
memory and recollection, especially recollection  
became sharp.

Spring and fall, spring, fall,  
spring in fall, fall . . .

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then all of spring.

I could not quite recall it but was reminded of  
a kind of hard bright candy:  
the hardness and brightness.

Every note of the Aubade was new to me  
but the whole thing was known.

It was registered and recognized.

And I had the impression that all of one's happiest life, stirring,  
was relived in these moments. As it was.

Finally one or the other of us ended.

That evening at about sunset

I suddenly noticed that the mockingbird had begun again.

Whereas I could not.

Charles Edward Eaton

*Periphery*

Not to be seen, not to be loved again,  
This is a focus of the summer's end.  
I have rose leaves in a jar, they smell of spice:  
This is a focus of our modern pain,  
Not to know what things intend,  
Not to love until they no longer are—  
The world turns on the axle of a jar  
Of things we do not know suffice.

Surely nothing more our grief so taxes  
As turning on so small an axis.  
Such loss should leave a large death in the soul—  
But I can tell you it is more colloquial.  
I, for one, have never seen  
Rose-death by hanging or by guillotine—  
Outcry-haunted, among scattered petals baffled,  
I grant but cannot find the locus of the scaffold.

---

CHARLES EDWARD EATON's fourth volume of poetry, *A Peony for Apollo*,  
will appear next fall.

Donald Davie

*Auto Wreckers*

To live, he had said, unfettered on the open  
Curve of a continent was his ambition:  
The old frontiersman's destiny and elation.

And as he spoke, a fly that over the open  
Curve of the continent moved, hung, overhung  
(The long curve dipping) there, on his porch, the Pacific.

Book and an oriental lamp, and mats  
Grey on the floor, a gun-grey radio,  
The great hearth burning fragrant eucalyptus—

Old World squalor of a shanty coast  
Grew elegant, so spaciouly dispersed.  
(The fly still ran, stopped, ran and stopped.)

Then it lit out. The sun that over the open  
Curve of a virgin continent moved on  
Into the wilderness lit his wings' blue-metal.

And obelisks to Terminus, a god  
Once honoured under Colorado's roof,  
A god of bonds and limits, rose

In Parody, Nevada, where the cars  
By obscene stages mount as once the bull  
Mounted his cows behind the unopened curve.

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DONALD DAVIE, a native of Ireland, has appeared often in *Shenandoah*.  
He is presently teaching in England.

Sam Bradley

*In-Between Weather*

Uncommon that day, as if the wind  
Might blow quite seasonless, quite bare  
Of pollen or snow. I tried to spend

Sky's clearness in walking. Small time to share  
The way with thoughtful eyes or suppose  
Some quiet friend observed me there.

Rumor observed, and catastrophe  
Stared unblinking, coiled under a rose.  
The unintended asked where my intentions end,  
Since, obviously,

I sought to depend

Not on the opening nor on the close  
Of the day, of the road. Rashness in me  
Sought neither to hold nor to dispose.

Blood-flowers, curled or coiled, watched jealously.

Frost, the hidden usurper, grinned  
And put me down among his foes.

But why should seasons be  
Landmarks of a man or sovereign of me?

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SAM BRADLEY lives in Honeybrook, Pennsylvania. Other of his poems have appeared in *Approach*, *Olivant* and *Phylon*. He teaches English at Lebanon Valley College.

James K. Shillington

*Wharf Street*

This was my proper street of reveries,  
Of gabbling wells, of doors and windows bright,  
Of gingerbread facades and gingko trees,  
Of sleepy waters and of soft sunlight.  
This was my carefully woven peace and then  
The unconverted brain slept out its night.  
And now the emptiness has come again  
(As wood will turn to wood and stone to stone . . .)  
To form no endless answer for all men  
Of happiness wrought from our dreams alone.  
For in the nervous night the flat leaves quiver;  
Flight is in the wind and in the bone.  
And anguished waters whimper in their shiver  
Perhaps contentment is across the river . . . . .

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JAMES K. SHILLINGTON is a member of the Department of Chemistry at Washington and Lee University. His two poems are part of a series entitled "The Uncompassed Rose, Twelve Successions on a Theme." The theme, "Nirvana," is as follows:

And so at last I came to rest upon your multicolored breast  
And found impaled, shrike-like, with me  
Love and dread divinity.

James K. Shillington

*Orate, Lepidoptera*

Oh Lord, wherewith the moon pale tulips rise,  
Helpless in sleep we sink in silent seas.  
Witness our love, now lost in nacreous eyes,  
Wrapped in self-pity's cold chrysalides.  
Let us awake where dawn wet tulips flame,  
Drying soft wings before the sun's bright face.  
Give us our strength and poise then let us claim  
One gilded flight before Your specimen case.  
Sweet subtle Will, which seems to crucify  
Each soul on its uncommon common-pin,  
Although all pins may have like radii,  
Yet clip the time we writhe and take us in.  
And madmen's mouths which sing the willow's song  
Prophecy our sorrow . . . how long? How long!



Hoke Norris

## THE SAVING OF SAM TRACY

Sam Tracy squirmed on the back bench while Preacher Moses Apple preached and preached. Sam didn't notice the July heat in the little white church. He didn't hear the murmured anguish all about him. He knew only Preacher Apple's singing, shouting voice and the knife it plunged into his heart.

"If you wronged any man," the preacher shouted to his sweating, moaning flock, "go tell him, tell him you're sorry. Then get up in the church house and tell the brothers and sisters. Confess your sins and then go and sin no more."

Sam heard, and felt the breath of Satan on his neck, the fingers of death on his shoulder, the darkness of the grave at his feet, the heat of hell through all his being. Oh, he moaned, listening to the voice, oh, there were plenty of people Sam Tracy had wronged. Plenty. He faced them all now, people the world wide wronged by Sam Tracy while he sailed the seven seas. People all over the United States of America wronged by Sam Tracy while he wandered here and there ashore. People here in the old home town wronged before he left, wronged after he came back. He squirmed and swallowed, and his fingernails sank into the soft pine of the bench he sat on.

Preacher Apple's arms fell. He bowed his head. The congregation sang "The Ninety and Nine" and then "Almost Persuaded," for it was Thursday night, getting on toward the end of the week's revival, time to be solemn and mournful. As the last crying words of "Almost Persuaded" trembled on the night air—*almost, almost, but lost*—Sam Tracy broke from his seat and ran up the aisle and took Preacher Apple's sweating hand.

"Bless you, brother," said the beaming preacher.

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HOKE NORRIS is a Chicago newspaperman whose stories have appeared in *Prairie Schooner* and Martha Foley's Best Short Story collections. His novel, *All the Kingdoms of Earth*, was published in 1956.

"I want to confess," Sam cried into the preacher's bent ear. "Right now, before the brothers and sisters."

"Getting late now for the confessing, brother," the preacher said behind his hand. "Come back tomorrow night." He turned and raised his arms and pleaded, "Oh, are there others? Oh, won't you come, won't you?"

The next morning Sam awoke and lay breathless and wide-eyed. After a moment he said to himself, "Tonight I confess." Then, after another moment, "But in private first. That was what the preacher meant."

He bounded out of bed. With fingers that trembled on cloth and button, he dressed himself in his red and black checkered shirt and blue denim pants. Downstairs, he didn't seem to see or taste the breakfast set before him by Mrs. Hunt, the landlady. Mrs. Hunt was a widow with her hair dyed red, and she looked at Sam Tracy's black curls, his long black eyelashes, his blue eyes, his fine features, his long, strong body, and she sighed and dreamed. Many a woman had sighed and dreamed before her, and she reckoned, with an agony of jealousy, that many a one would sigh and dream after her.

"Sam," she said, seeing his ham and eggs untouched, his coffee cold, "you ain't eating. Are you sick?"

He jumped, looked ashamed and cut his ham. That look of shame hurt Mrs. Hunt deep in her heart. Such a fine boy, such a handsome man, so quiet and sensitive. She tossed her head with a fierce, defensive defiance, her black eyes flashing, her mouth stiffening and thinning. Some people said Sam Tracy was a no-good, a gambler, a moonshiner, a bootlegger, a tramp, a rascal, a black sinner. Oh, maybe there were plenty of names for the likes of Sam Tracy. Mrs. Hunt tossed her head again. He wasn't bad. He just wasn't. Even if he was, she didn't care. Who would care, she wondered, her mood softening, her chin in her hands, her elbows on the table—who would care, hearing Sam Tracy's voice, seeing him cross the floor now and turn and smile? She sighed, and dreamed.

Sam went out, to the center of Mountain Springs. Here the town's two streets were like a cross on a map. Stores, the bank, the

postoffice, the church, the pool hall, the courthouse, Lawyer Fred Maple's office—these clustered at the intersections, and on the arms of the cross people had built their houses in groves of oak and maple. Beyond, in sight from the center of town, the open country rose up into the mountains of the Blue Ridge, the streets becoming crooked roads through farm and forest.

Sam stood at the corner, looking up and down the streets. Where to start first? There were so many, so many. He breathed a prayer. A boy—the preacher's boy, in fact, little Moses Apple, Jr.—came along and looked with wide eyes and open mouth at Sam Tracy standing there in the morning sunlight. Sam smiled and said, "Howdy, boy." Moses Junior grinned and was so pleased he was unable to speak. Some day, he promised himself, he'd be just like Sam Tracy, if he could ever escape from the parsonage—tall, strong, handsome, free, wonderfully and mysteriously sinful.

"Son," the hero asked, bending over and putting a hand on the boy's head, "have you been saved?"

The boy drew back. "God a-mighty," he whispered, and ran.

Sam shook his head, seeing Moses Junior run. In a moment, though, he lifted his eyes and looked upon the blue hills. He took a deep breath and told himself how good he felt. Never felt like this before in all his life. A burden had rolled off his back. "Almost rolled off," he said, frowning again, "almost, but not quite."

Turning, he walked three doors northward and stepped into the coolness and dimness of Tim McAllister's pool hall. "Tim," he said immediately, drawing a roll of bills from his pants pocket, "this money is all yours."

Tim leaned his fat stomach into the edge of the counter, his mouth hanging open, his little blue eyes gleaming down at the money on the dark wood.

"It's all yours, Tim," Sam said, a bright smile on his face. "Seventy-eight dollars. Count it."

"Sam," Tim said, glaring, "What in hell's got into you?"

Sam wished Tim wouldn't curse, but decided not to convert him just now. "I won it from you at poker last Saturday night," he explained.

"Yeah, Sam, sure, you did. But did I complain?"

"No, Tim, you were real decent about it. But I got to give it back to you. I just got to. Gambling's a sin, and I can't keep money I got by sinning."

Tim's mouth fell open again, and his eyes sparked hard and bright in the morning light. "You're kidding, Sam Tracy," he said.

"No, I ain't kidding."

"Well," Tim said, "I'd be a fool to turn down seventy-eight bucks, Sam." His face clouded. "But I don't trust you, Sam Tracy. This money counterfeit, or stolen, or something?"

"Can't blame you for not trusting me, Tim, but it ain't counterfeit, and it ain't stolen. It's as level as any money I ever paid out."

Tim picked up the money and counted it. "Seventy-eight, all right," he muttered, looking up through his sandy eyebrows. "Sam Tracy, you're a damn fool."

Sam took a deep breath and opened and closed his hands. "Tim," he said in a weak voice, "there's one other thing I got to tell you. I won it with a marked deck."

Tim grunted and snapped his head up. Shoving the money into his pants pocket, beneath his dirty apron, he slowly circled the bar, his face beet red, his eyes almost hidden behind their puffed lids. Sam backed toward the door. Tim picked up a cue stick. Sam ran, and didn't stop until he had turned the corner.

Then he stood for a moment, shaking his head. "Maybe it ain't going to be so easy after all," he said to himself.

He stopped next at Calhoun's Store, across the street. Enos Calhoun, a sour little man wearing gold-rimmed glasses and an open vest, asked him what he could do for him. Sam faced him square and said, "Enos, I come to confess to you, before I confess in the church house, in front of all the brothers and sisters. I wronged you. That liquor I sold you back in June—."

Enos stiffened and blared his eyes.

Sam struggled on, "I'm sorry, but it was poison stuff, made out of lye. I'm awful sorry it made you and Katie sick."

Enos seemed about to choke. His adams-apple bobbed up and

down, his face paled, he raised shaking hands and tried to speak. His jaws worked but no sound came out.

"It was rot-gut liquor, Enos, nothing but rot-gut," Sam said, "and I want to give you your money back. And when you see Katie again, will you tell her I'm sorry?"

Enos turned slowly, his body moving but his feet staying put, like a stunned calf, just as a curtain at the back swept aside and his wife Rose stepped into the room. Enos made choking sounds and raised his hands. Rose walked into the light, showing her face red and as menacing as a thundercloud up on Old Baldy.

Sam took some money from his pants pocket. "Here it is, Enos," he said, putting it on the counter beside the egg basket. "And how much was the doctor bill? I want to pay that too."

"Man," Enos said in a croaking whisper, shrinking and watching Rose, "man, you know what you just done?"

"I thought so," Rose cried, gaining her voice. She moved into the room like a two-horse wagon. "You and Katie, drinking liquor together while I visited my sick Ma." She began shouting: "What else'd you do? What else?"

Sam backed to the door, turned and jumped out into the street. He heard a crash behind him. Turning, he saw Enos lying in a mess of broken eggs and a crushed basket, Rose above him, a broom held aloft and then descending.

Shaking his head again, frowning more deeply than ever now, Sam walked out the south arm of the cross. Toward the end, near the forest, he turned in at a cottage, crossed its sagging porch and knocked on the peeling white paint of its front door. The door opened slowly, just a crack, then was suddenly pulled wide.

"Sam Tracy," said the rich, excited voice of a woman. Sam stood for a moment, studying this woman. She was blonde and rather stout, and a smile was on her face. With a weak, chilled feeling, Sam decided that he knew all about her, her warm, winning ways, the wise curl of her lips, the wisdom in her eyes and in her body. He hesitated while she spoke his name again and urged him in, her eyes bright but tender and hoping. He was being tested, he told himself. The devil was working hard here. He squared his shoulders and went in.

"Pearl," he said in a strained voice, "is Dell here?"

"Dell?" she exclaimed, drawing back. Her eyes darkened and her long fingers clutched her blue robe at her bosom. "Sam, you were never one to worry about husbands."

"I got to talk to the both of you."

She drew back again, her perplexity becoming alarm.

"I got to confess my sins," he began.

"Uh-oh," she grunted, lowering her head and glaring. "You drunk again, Sam Tracy?" He shook his head. "Then you got religion."

This last was a flat accusation, but he nodded and smiled, feeling his face grow warm.

"And you want to confess to Dell?"

He nodded again.

"You're kidding." She came to him. "Lord, oh, Lord, I do believe you're serious." She studied his eyes. Gradually her face broke apart in anger and fear. "Sam," she said in a husky whisper, "don't you know he'd kill us both? Don't you know that?"

"Even if he does, Pearl, I got to confess to him," Sam said, hanging on to his resolve. "Then I got to get up in the church house and confess in front of all the brothers and sisters."

"In the church house?" she said in a voice like the scream of a buzz saw. "Before all the brothers and sisters? Oh, Lord, Sam, no, please don't do that." When he drew away from her she clawed her hands and tried to grab him, to scratch and slap. He pulled himself free and went to the door. She clung to him, striking, scratching and spitting.

"I can tell you now, Pearl, that I'm sorry," he said, jerking himself away. "Later I got to say the same to Dell. When'll he be in town again?"

She ran from him suddenly and flung herself upon her stuffed sofa. Her body shook with her sobs. She looked up at him with wet, pleading eyes, held out her hands and cried, "Oh, no, Sam, no, please . . ."

Sam walked out, fingering a scratch on the back of his hand, swallowing, licking his lips.

Twenty minutes later he stood at the door of an unpainted

cabin built on the slope of a wooded hill. The cabin leaned so steep it seemed about to slide into the creek that ran through the valley below. Sam knocked. In a moment the door was flung open. A tall, bearded man in overalls—taller even than Sam, and more powerful in arm, shoulder and leg—greeted him with a booming voice and slapped him so hard on the back he stumbled forward into the room.

"Tank," Sam said, straightening and gasping for breath, "I got to confess—."

"Confess?" Tank Tolliver boomed. "Confess what?"

"I sinned—."

"Who ain't? Want a drink?"

"No, Tank, I ain't going to drink no more, and I ain't going to moonshine and bootleg no more either."

Tank's mouth fell open. His lips looked like a curious sort of red egg set in a tremendous black nest. "What's got in you, man?" he asked, bending over, his black eyes shining in amusement.

"I'm going to the church house, Tank, and confess all my sins. First I want to confess to you."

Tank thrust the fingers of his right hand into his beard and scratched. "All, Sam?" he asked in a soft voice. "You going to confess all your sins? And you think moonshining and bootlegging is a sin?"

Sam nodded.

"And you going to tell the brothers and sisters about moonshining and bootlegging with *me*?"

Sam nodded again.

"No, you ain't, Sam Tracy," Tank said in his gentle voice.

"Yes, I am, Tank," Sam said, swallowing and backing away. "And I'm going to tell how I cheated you—."

"Cheated me!"

Sam took a deep breath. "Yes, Tank, cheated you. The cops didn't get that load and that car up in Virginia, back in April. I sold 'em and told you they got 'em."

Tank Tolliver beat the hell out of Sam Tracy and threw him out of the house.

Sam dragged himself back to Mountain Springs. Mrs. Hunt yelped and cried when she saw him, and with fluttering hands and tender words helped him up to his bed. She brought wet cloths, which she placed on his wounds, and a drink of white liquor, which he refused. When he seemed to be resting, she stood at the foot of his bed, weeping and patting his left foot.

"Sam," she said, dabbing her eyes with a violet, scented handkerchief, "what in the world you been up to? How'd you get in this mess?"

Sam shook his head and closed his eyes.

"Sam," she said, patting his foot, "all kinds of folks been here to see you. Mr. Grover Clayton the banker, and Mr. Fred Maple the lawyer, and even the preacher, Reverend Moses Apple. What you up to, Sam?"

Sam touched his swollen lips with the end of his tongue. He put his fingertips to his swollen eyes. He had forgotten those people. Mr. Grover Clayton the banker once got drunk with him, out at the fishing camp on the creek, and boasted about tapping the till (and him the Sunday school superintendent, too). Mr. Fred Maple the lawyer had him a woman he met now and then at that very same fishing camp. The preacher occasionally bought a half-gallon jar of white lightning, for purely medicinal purposes, of course. And here stood Mrs. Hunt, who hadn't collected any rent from Sam Tracy in many a month. He had forgotten about her too. Sam Tracy had cheated all these people, in one way or another. It seemed like, though, in getting cheated they sort of cheated too.

"What'd those folks say?" he asked.

"They didn't say much, Sam. It was the *way* they said it. They whispered—they looked all around—scared to death. And Sam, did you hear about the fight at the grocery store? About Rose Calhoun beating up old Enos? They do say she broke his collarbone and made an omelet out of him." Mrs. Hunt laughed, then silenced herself, her eyes darkening. "Sam, you going to confess *all* your sins tonight?"

He kept still, his eyes now on the stained ceiling of his room.



The word had got about. He ought to have kept his plans to himself.

"You wouldn't tell about us, in public, would you, Sam?" Mrs. Hunt asked in a straining, broken voice, her hand stilled on his foot.

"Mrs. Hunt," he asked, "you think you could get that drink of liquor past my lips without burning the cuts?"

She hesitated, for just an instant, then hastened to his side and held the glass to his lips, putting her hand on his black curls and looking down into his face with a smile and a warm glow in her eyes.

Sam let the liquor settle and take hold. After a moment he said, "Mrs. Hunt, the truth's a some-time thing you got to handle mighty particular."

"I reckon it is, Sam," she said, stroking his curls.

Evans Harrington

## LAVINIA

When Harry Foster was sixteen and Lavinia Williams was seventeen he made a pass at her. He often made passes at girls in those days, not altogether because he wanted to, at least partly because he never was sure it wasn't expected. One heard so many stories, and one didn't want to be laughed at, even secretly. So, on the single date they had, he drove her out to Reddock's Hill, their town's version of lover's lane, and, when she didn't move or speak, pulled her to him and kissed her. She kissed him too for a moment, he thought, and her lips were cold and trembling. But then she pushed him away sharply, saying, "Don't!" in a small level voice which was unmistakable; and she sat rigid, her long profile faint and severe in the light from the dash, all the way back to her house. She went erect and silent up the walk beside him and into her house, and they never dated or spoke more than casually from that night on.

Until many years later, that is, when he came back to teach there and they found themselves colleagues. There had been the war, college, graduate work, marriage for him; and things seemed quite different. Certainly they were in Harry's case. As a husband and father of two, as well as official mentor to almost two hundred potential citizens, he was considerably sobered, so much so that he often didn't sleep well. Lavinia had sobered too, where there was hardly room for more sobriety. She frequently didn't sleep at all, even after her doctor began to trust tranquillizers. Harry knew because she told him. As the only former classmates on the staff, they became very friendly for a while, though he always felt guilty because he knew he was an impostor and thought she must see it too.

It was the matter of standards, he thought, or outlook or

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glands or training: whatever it is that shapes us. Because the difference was there just as basically as it had been in their high school days. The students didn't study, of course, and it worried him too sometimes; in fact, he delivered his share of pedants' lectures. But they were after all the only students available, and grades were nebulous things, and he had to have a job; so he juggled his averages and followed the curve and failed no more than he gave A's to, about ten per cent in each case. While Lavinia's percentage of failures climbed steadily year by year, until finally they reached the halfway mark, with only a rare unqualified A.

And there were other things: She was losing her youth and looks—and she had been pretty, even beautiful sometimes, in a tall, darkly aloof, long-boned way. But now her skin was drying, faintly seamed, and the flesh of her forearms and calves was receding. So of course her clothes became impeccable, the colors more carefully chosen, the material more flawlessly groomed, with each year. And there was her particular quality: he always remembered an incident from those days.

He had gone to her office. He often went there because, though he was an impostor and invariably felt uncomfortable with her, there was something in her presence. It had been there the night he had tried to kiss her. It had been stronger even than the fear of being thought naive. Somehow she always seemed "more real"—it was the most consistent expression he found for it—than anyone else he had ever known.

Anyway, he went to her office, and she was busy over a chart.

"Learning the intricacies of the bar graph?" he said.

"No," she said, "the personality profiles. Have you tabulated yours?"

"Tabulated them?" he said. "Do we have to?"

Someone in the hierarchy of state education had conceived the idea of having all the students rate their teachers' personalities. Harry had glanced at his, found them disturbingly to the point, and tossed them aside before he became morose.

"Oh no," Lavinia said, "but I should think you'd want to. I have."

And she had. There were some thirty-odd points on each profile sheet, matters concerning voice, dress, bearing; and each student was to rate the teacher A through F on each point. In all there must have been close to 30,000 letter ratings to plot into her chart. She could tell exactly how many students had rated her A on appearance, B on voice, D or F on sympathy and understanding.

"How long did you work on that thing?" Harry asked.

"Oh, it didn't take long," she said. "Six or eight hours, I guess. But I didn't mind the work; it's the results that bother me."

"The results?" he said.

"Only one item really," she said, "and I don't suppose it's important. But nearly every student rated me F on sense of humor." She looked up at him and her large brown eyes seemed suddenly ecstatic with tears. "I think I have a sense of humor, don't you? I've always prided myself on it."

But not long after that he was made principal, and they were no longer so close. There was no open break, no real argument even. But he had to speak to her often in the name of irate parents whose children had failed, and they had discussions, those makeshifts of civilization by which people circumvent convictions. Or rather, in their case, by which he circumvented them and she watched with apparent mounting panic.

And then three things happened in quick succession. First her mother died, in the spring of one year. Then, in the spring of the next, her father re-married and, almost simultaneously, Harry had to fire her. He tried to delay it, pointed out to the parents of the failing children what a shock her mother's death, and even more the father's re-marriage, had been to her. There were days in that time when he felt he could see her clinging—to her work, to her room and office, to the established pattern, the propriety of a black tailored suit and white silk blouse and polished, medium-heeled pumps; and to her standards, of course, the standards her father had given her, Harry knew, and almost the only things he had given her, then deserted both her and them.

Because she had lived with her parents and the standards, perhaps had even believed they were synonymous. She was an

only child, and her father was a minister, a very stalwart and convincing fundamentalist. So in his house the values were real. If all the world abandoned them he not only kept them but pointed out the world's defection to her, so that she had retired more and more into both family and standards. Then the mother was gone: a great loss but only a physical one, and not unexpected; there was still the father, the house, the tissue of meaning. Then suddenly even that was ripped away. Because, in the system of values, wasn't devotion implicit: love, loyalty and respect even for a memory, a spirit wife of forty years' habit, dutifully waiting in Heaven?

So the father had defected too, leaving her nothing but the values; and the only course remaining was to cling even harder, and in the process, perhaps even unwittingly, Harry thought, push them even higher, the better to affirm them.

Which was why he finally had to fire her, of course. One simply doesn't fail almost a hundred students out of less than two hundred. He did it a month before school was out, to give her more time to find another place. She didn't make a scene. Her eyes were large with tears once or twice, but she looked down and blinked until they cleared. He didn't try to justify either the decision or himself. He didn't think he could, and he didn't want to try even if he might have. Then she thanked him for telling her so soon and forthrightly, he said he regretted it, and they weren't together again until the senior trip.

None of it was planned but none of it was accidental either, he later thought, except the superficial things: Barbara, his wife, didn't go on the trip, as she usually did, because their eldest daughter was in a play; and the seniors, for once, were a mild group who stayed in the casino or the swimming area, not venturing far out on the mile-long pier where he and Lavinia established themselves for such an event.

They were in Portereves, on Mobile Bay. Each year the seniors went there, accompanied by the principal and their class sponsor, who that year happened to be Lavinia. In past years ferries had come to Portereves from Mobile, and the pier which had accommodated them was a tremendous thing, almost like a park in

itself. A casino was at the land end. Swimming areas complete with dressing rooms were between the pilings about midway. There were boat docks, fishing platforms, even a sheltered lounging area three-quarters of a mile out. That was where Lavinia and Harry were sitting.

It was a dark night, but clear. There were many stars, and Mobile was a painted inferno on the horizon not quite below the blue swell of the bay. The wind was high, and the waves rose and hissed and shocked against the pilings. Harry and Lavinia were wearing swim suits, slippers, and robes. It was not cold, but chill lay somewhere in him: perhaps from the strangeness, he thought, the eerie effect on his land-bred senses. He imagined Lavinia felt it too.

They talked desultorily, about the students, the school, their lack of knowledge of the sea. They stopped talking. The wind slicked her hair back, streamed it over her white terry-cloth robe. He lit a cigarette with difficulty in the wind.

"I've never smoked," she said.

"Have one?" He offered the pack automatically. "They kill you, I'm told."

She laughed and looked at the pack. "I'd never light it in this wind."

He gave her his to hold and lit one for her. She took it and puffed it gingerly, as though even its touch was contaminating. He showed her how to inhale and she managed it without choking because the wind whipped away most of each draw.

"It makes me dizzy," she said. "It makes my legs tremble."

"That's the whole point," he said. "The experience. Unfortunately, you soon get used to it."

Again she laughed. He had seldom heard her laugh, he realized. There was an odd quality in it, like the chill which the bay made in him. "Yes, experience," she said. "I've never had much experience."

He didn't answer that. They smoked in silence, looking out at the dark-flexing waves. Suddenly she stood up and moved to the railing at the pier's edge. The robe didn't come to her knees, and her legs showed long and white, still good legs though the hol-

lows at her ankles were too marked. "We're getting old, Harry," she said to the bay. The wind whipped the words back at him.

"Yes, I know," he said. "I often think of it."

"Do you?" she said. "I didn't know. I don't know what anyone thinks."

He was going to let that pass, but she turned toward him as though expecting an answer.

"Who does?" he said.

"What do you want, Harry?" she said. She drew awkwardly on the short cigarette. Her fingers shook, and she was looking at him.

"Want?" he said.

She threw the cigarette behind her with a quick sideways motion of her arm, not looking at it. "Are you satisfied?" she said. "I don't mean just with things."

"I know," he said. "I know what you mean."

She was leaning on the rail, her hands behind her, her body bent forward, her long high-cheeked face faintly deprecating in the dim light from a pier lamp far down toward the swimming area. "Well?" she said.

"I don't know," he said. "You summed it up when you asked, didn't you? I want more than things. How can you talk about nothings?"

"No, not nothings," she said. "No-things but not nothings. Happiness isn't a thing, or living."

In her voice there was the same chill quality that had been in her laugh. "No," he said carefully. "That's right."

"But they're real, aren't they?" she said. "You know they're real, don't you? I should think people who're married, who have children and..." She stopped speaking but her face continued the question, leaning forward from the white robe, the wind whipping her fine straight hair against it, her eyes urgent, not really seeing him, probing from the shadows her cheeks cast.

"I have a good marriage," he said, and was ashamed even as he spoke.

Her apology was painful to see, embarrassed yet impatient too, her long body jerky in the short robe. "I didn't mean that.



I'm sorry if it sounded that way. Barbara is fine; I know it. But I mean two people—I thought two people . . .”

“Might make the no-things real?” he said. “Might understand and *be* them? Everyone thinks so, I guess. Maybe that's what love means, that glimpse, but we each want different no-things.”

Still her long body leaned from the railing, her face asked its question, her eyes probed for what wasn't in him, wasn't anywhere that he knew of. Then she straightened and moved slowly up the pier. “Let's walk to the end,” she said. “I've never been out there.”

The wind was even stronger, the waves louder, more violent against the pilings. They could no longer hear even the muted echoes of the pavilion and the swimming area. At the very end was a large shed. The darkness under it was almost smothering, the darkness and salt odor and the relentless flow of the wind. The chill was in his stomach then, and spreading up his back. She stopped. He couldn't see her but he sensed that she had, and he did too.

“Harry,” she said, and her voice was a narrow murmur over the waves' wide one, “I don't understand it, all you said out there, all I said too. I don't understand anything.”

“No,” he said. “I don't either.”

“I don't mean like that,” she said, and she made a startling movement. “I mean I don't care.”

“Lavinia, listen,” he said. He wished he could see her face, see anything: the chill was like hysteria in him. “We'd better go back, hadn't we? It's just the night, the sea and all.”

But her hands gripped even tighter through his robe, and her breath was warm against his face. “You did once,” she whispered. “You wanted to once, on Reddock's Hill.”

“Lavinia, listen,” he said. “It's getting cold. We'd better go back, hadn't we?”

“It doesn't matter,” she said. “Just tonight. Just once. I was wrong that time. I was afraid and silly. You loved me. You still do. You said yourself you weren't happy.”

The chill was in the muscles of his shoulders, the calves of his legs; it tingled against the balls of his feet. He had sometimes

felt that way while hunting or fishing, after working very hard at his desk. He remembered once standing beside a small lake when there was no wind and a young sorrel horse had come over a rise and walked down to drink at the water's edge. His body had hurt for all of it: the blue distant bowl of evening, the deep olive mirror of water, the muscled, still body of the horse, and the gnats and cow-dung and brassy-dusty August odor.

And it was like that under the shed, with her isolated and aging and warm-breathing before him. He hurt, but his legs and back and arms exulted. He wanted to run stretching. His throat ached on a strong sound, neither cry nor laugh. He smelled the bay, saw it in its odor, and wanted to embrace it, soar over it and gather it, like the image of the Holy Spirit brooding on The Waters. *Love her? Happy?* For a moment he tried to contemplate the words, remember their meaning. But then he was lifting her, wanting to put her inside him where the knowledge was, the tenderness: there with Barbara, his children, the bay, the stars, Mobile.

But instead he hurt her, of course, lowered her gently, cradled her in his arms, and hurt her briefly and violently so that she cried. Then he lay in the darkness and the stifling wind, and listened to her sobs, and cursed with savage pointlessness, until she said, "You do love me, don't you?"

David Blair

## BY LOVE UNPARSED

She said: "I think, I'll have the eggs, Benedict, please."

He drew a wry amusement from this evidence that she underestimated him. Not, perhaps, the sort of evidence, this, physically present, which would stand up, in a court of law, but he was too experienced a judge of human inference and implication to deny of its validity or vacate its claims. Her slightly smug smile, which reminded him disturbingly of something surely remembered but not now to be summoned immediately to conscious memory, indicated that he was supposed to grasp most of the implications of her statement, but not all of them, enough to put him in the psychologically inferior position, yet not enough to give him the clue to her inmost thoughts and workings. But, he thought, she was wrong about that; the statement gave her away utterly and might thus be turned to advantage, if only he could make her realize that all its shadings were duly noted, appreciated by the eye of a connoisseur, or rather, by his ear, though to the eye as well was offered a series of impressions probably misleading too.

He thought, I must be calm about this, not become emotionally involved, but, taking the statement on its merits, examine into its meaning. On the most obvious level, it meant that she was a woman of character and decision; she had not, as would many women under the circumstances, dawdled, but, fixing the menu with a bright and bird-like eye, had affixed and affirmed her choice as expeditiously as bird with worm. That was it, of course, that nagging memory: her expression was alert, suspicious and sidelong as that of a robin; her black hair, her beak-like nose, even the maroon orlon sweater she wore about her plump maternal bosom, lent credence to the simile.

Now she looked at him quizzically; was, then, he, rather than the item of the menu, her worm? He is God's worm, she would be thinking, and the Court's, and therefore meat, meet, mete for me.

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But beyond this level, beyond her quick percipience which rejected lobster salad out of hand, granted no second appeal to veal cutlet Parmigiana, spurned frogs' legs with their too earthy overtone or garlic, there were the moral and religious and sexual aspects of her choice. He must face it head-on, with no squeamishness, though it would be so much easier to avoid the embarrassing aspects of the situation, let it go by the boards. Begin, then, with the egg: symbol, indeed, of fertility, of the predominant, all-encompassing role of the female in perpetuation of the species, an activity in which the male was incidental and merely ornamental, and, indeed, now, and perhaps increasingly in the future, quite unnecessary. This part of it was clear enough; any jury, chosen with adequate but not excessive use of the challenge, would convict her of trying to put a mere man in his place.

Equally evident was Benedict. *Benedicti sunt qui*—and which if not all of the beatific qualities would be her choice? Perhaps, in her pride, she thought of herself as meek, surely, as litigant, likely to inherit the earth, the disposition of The Judge being known to her. He, a working lawyer, preferred not to take things quite so much for granted, but a conviction of blessedness must, he assented to it, operate powerfully in behalf of its possessor, unless it made her rashly unwary of the opposing and countervailing force of evil, symbolized, now, perhaps, for her, and if not now surely soon, by him, the worm of God and Court.

Did she herself, though, realize the full force of the Benedictine choice? What was this concoction but eggs, on a bed of ham, atop English muffins, smothered in sauce of Hollandaise? She knew that his ancestry was part English, part Dutch; surely too she considered him something of a ham. (Certain alarming consequences of this symbol, egg reposing on ham, had best be avoided; this was the proper realm of psychiatry, not of the law.) This was the insult direct, masking, perhaps, her desire to devour him, or at any rate to *order* him. Did she see as well, that in her choice of eggs swirled in briny waters, she expressed the wish to drown him, perhaps in her tears, perhaps in the asservations she soon would make as to her innocence, in order to disarm him further?

Perhaps not; of this he could not be sure. But he was reason-

ably certain that she understood another aspect of her statement which was supposed to be too deep for such as him, the man of logical, literal, unimaginative mind. She had said, not, "I'll have eggs, Benedict"; she had said, "I'll have *the* eggs, Benedict." Fate and chickens conspired in her behalf; she was convinced of it, but this she did not mean him to know. Not just any eggs, but certain eggs, in her view, were reserved to her; in her conviction of blessedness she would believe the hand of the chef could be guided to no eggs but those destined for her palate, her stomach, and ultimately for parts of her body she would prefer not to think about. It was as if she had issued a spiritual writ of replevin against the kitchen, though she would, of course, think of it as the *cuisine*.

He pulled himself together. If he could see all this, not being supposed to, he could, he supposed, rise to the occasion, handle a difficult situation as his ever suave father might have before him. In spite of her attitude, he had his duties which he would perform without allowing emotions to interfere, but first he must put matters on a proper basis. Benedict or no, the fact appeared to be that she had run her car into a pillar of the Courthouse after consuming three Alexanders at *La Haute Vie*, an unwise potation in an ill-chosen spot. His best efforts could no more than palliate the medicine she now must drink. In his response, then, he must show that he understood the implications of her remark but was not overly impressed by them; that a deviation from the honest path could not be procured by such means or any means; that, despite her state of grace, as she saw it, and despite his enormous prestige with the Court officials he was no more able than he was willing to try to have the charges against her altogether quashed. She might, at any rate, emerge from the painful experience ahead with her rational sense fortified and even with a valuable motto, which might be suggested to her at the appropriate moment: Think before you drink. And she, then enlightened, might reply, "I believe, because it is absurd." Time would tell.

Best, he thought, keep it simple; she was intelligent and sensitive to a degree, despite her manifold illusions and absurdities. He would prefer not to be brutal, but this was no time for nice-

ties of false reassurance. She would know that much was clear to him; a pretense of ignoring implications altogether therefore seemed most appropriate, most likely to take false winds, gently, from her careening sails.

Feeling a bit like a cad, he said, sharply: "Waiter!" and watched, sadness in his heart, compassionate though logical, her face fall.

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